The most hideous aspects of Dracula and his vampire brethren are visual ones – pallor, dark hirsute hands, piercing eyes, razor-sharp fangs. The settings, too, in Dracula are integral to creating mood: for example, Harker’s journey into Transylvania includes descriptions that “are so thrilling and visual that they have acquired a permanent place in the popular imagination.”1 How could adaptors dramatizing Dracula possibly bring that kind of menace to a genre that relies entirely on one sense – the aural one – thereby giving the audience of radio drama the appropriate chills? In this article, I propose to examine the way the fearful aspects of Dracula and his brethren, as described in the original source material of novel or short story, such as Le Fanu’s “Carmilla”, Stevenson’s “Olalla”, and Forrest’s The Voyage of the Demeter, have been adapted for audio purposes, what techniques are used, whether they be in terms of writing or sound effects, and how successful the adaptations have been in maintaining a mood of terror and menace and in representing the memorable settings.

Bram Stoker may have had “a brilliant talent for fluid, natural-sounding, visually descriptive prose”,2 but as is so often the case, this does not necessarily translate well into other adaptive media. This article focuses on contemporary BBC radio adaptations, not only of Dracula the novel but “spin offs” which follow various strands introduced in the novel (Voyage of the Demeter and Sherlock Holmes vs. Dracula), and other nineteenth-century vampire stories (“Carmilla” and “Olalla”), between 1998 and 2011. In particular, it looks at the ways the intensely sensual (often visual) elements of the novel have been adapted and translated for radio and how the medium manages to convey emotions like fear and horror through the aural. The organization of this article is structured on the plays’ dependence

on the original Stoker text. It proceeds outward from adaptations like *Sherlock Holmes vs. Dracula* and *Voyage of the Demeter*, as “spin off” pieces which have roots in the Bram Stoker text. “Carmilla” and “Olalla” share themes but are not directly related to Bram Stoker’s text.

As is now well known, the leap from novel to stage was one considered at the outset by Stoker himself. *Dracula* on stage, after Henry Irving had laughed at the title role in a “shilling shocker”, was originally conceived as a five-hour dramatic reading with fifteen actors in May 1897. Problems inherent in adapting *Dracula* crop up here: certain scenes during the reading would have made no sense unless the action was somehow described or acted out. The “vast geographical sweep”\(^3\) was obviously problematic for the stage, and as Picard points out, by failing to gain access to Dracula’s psychology, problems of narrative and identification arise.

Nevertheless, by the 1920s, the Hamilton Deane stage version had morphed in to the John L. Balderston/Deane version, which was a “surprise hit” on Broadway, demonstrating, in David J. Skal’s view, “an essential dichotomy … which served practical, dramatic, and commercial considerations while working against Stoker’s vision”.\(^4\) The Balderston/Deane version has been particularly successful given its worldwide predominance, as well as having contributed many of the visual markers associated with *Dracula*. “Hungry expatriate” Béla Lugosi jumped to stardom in the role on Broadway, and then in the 1930 Tod Browning film, his “patent-leather hair, patent leather shoes, a continental accent, and bilious green makeup”\(^5\) creating an excellent transition between Rudolph Valentino and the grave.

**Dracula (1998) – aural ambiguity**

Because the lack of American copyright puts *Dracula* into the public domain, adaptations into various media have proliferated. The best known radio adaptation of *Dracula* is probably that by John Houseman and Orson Welles for *The Mercury Theater On the Air* in 1938 for the American CBS radio network: it starred Welles as Dracula and Seward and paved the way for *War of the Worlds* later that year.

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\(^3\) David J. Skal, “‘His Hour Upon the Stage’: Theatrical Adaptations of *Dracula*”, in *ibid.*, 374.
